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# AN ALTOGETHER NEW PRINCE FIVE CENTURIES ON

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*Carlos Frade*

## AN ALTOGETHER NEW PRINCE FIVE CENTURIES ON: BRINGING MACHIAVELLI TO BEAR ON OUR PRESENT

Our situation demands a new encounter with the thought of Machiavelli, and this confrontation involves a simultaneous engagement with Machiavelli's thought and our time. However, contrary to prevalent approaches, it is neither a merely textual or scholastic exegesis nor a 'return' to Machiavelli, but an attempt to put Machiavelli's thought to work in our time, so as to try to take the measure of our situation and envisage possible effective interventions in it. Both aspects or, as we could say, 'diagnoses', depend on a prior operation which consists in placing Machiavelli in its proper site: in the battlefield, confronting the grave problems we face. But this has direct consequences for us; it interpellates our own positioning and therefore questions the extent to which we desire to transform our situation or are attached to it.

In accordance with this approach, this essay will unfold in three parts. Firstly, I attempt to further clarify the Machiavellian site and to question from there intellectual and scholarly positions as they are usually understood and exercised. Secondly, I focus on the ways by which capitalism has brought about an altogether new temporality able to continuously renew itself through ever more frequent shocks and tremors which produce the kind of de-subjectivated human matter it needs. Finally, I address the conditions for the emergence of new figures of the people which may open the way to political subjectivation and thus bring about a new prince or collective subject commensurate with the new temporality. But before this, some preliminary remarks by way of introduction seem necessary.

One may feel that neither is Machiavelli's battlefield ours nor are our problems his problems. But those would be deceptive feelings. Indeed since nobody can deliberately wish to lead a *vivere servo* (a servile way of life), the conclusion to be drawn is that Machiavelli's battlefield may well be everyone's own, unless one has resigned oneself to accept that we already lead a *vivere libero* (a free way of life) or that, anyway, there is no alternative. With regard to the problems we face, it is true, as I want to show in this paper, that our situation has to be qualified as 'altogether new'. Our current

predicament is essentially defined by the seemingly inescapable, world-wide and all-encompassing subjection of 'human matter', which is desiring matter, to the automatism of the capitalist machinery. The problem is thus not only one of depersonalisation of political and social life; the gravest problem is that, in an apparently complete twist of Machiavelli, what is regularly renewed today is corruption—'corruption', to be read not as bribery and similar things which are only the effects of corruption, but Machiavellianly, as *political unfitness*—so that this unfitness for a truly political or free way of life has become mechanically self-reproduced and thus endemic.

In this situation one may wonder about the status of what must be called Machiavelli's principle of conservation of *virtù*, a *political* variant of the first principle of thermodynamics formulated for the first time by Machiavelli. This should not be too much of a surprise if one takes into account the philosophical background of Machiavelli's thought, that is, Epicurean philosophy with Democritean atomic physics at its core. The principle concerns a very subtle variety of energy which is energy political and whose name is *virtù*—a term to be read and understood not as moral virtue ('virtute' in Machiavelli's language) but in the comprehensive Machiavellian sense of virtue and "free from moraline (moralinfreie)", to put it in Nietzsche's apposite expression (*The Antichrist* 2).

"I judge the world—thus Machiavelli formulates the principle—always to have been in the same mode and there to have been as much good as bad in it. But the bad and the good vary from province ... though the world remained the same ... [and when *virtù* has not been] kept together, it is seen nonetheless to be scattered in many nations" (*Discourses* II Preface.2).<sup>1</sup>

Many may be tempted to take the view that, with the capitalist machinery holding tight the whole world and practically all realms of life, the world is rapidly losing *virtù* and Machiavelli's principle is rendered null and ineffectual. Yet, a different interpretation is not only possible, but necessary—one more consistent with Machiavelli's thought. I therefore assume that the effect of capitalism is not to diminish *virtù* in the world, that not even capitalism has, so far, been able to do that, but to make it even more scattered and dispersed, and thereby weaker so that the veritable difficulty today lies in bringing it or enough of it together. That this is possible is shown by a most remarkable implication of Machiavelli's principle, namely, that all peoples in the world

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<sup>1</sup> I use *Discourses*, *Prince*, *Histories* and similar titles to refer to Machiavelli's works; see bibliography. As customary, I quote by book (Roman numerals), chapter and eventually paragraph.

are capable of *virtù*. This implication can be immanently drawn from the conservation principle when the latter is placed in its context, that is, within Machiavelli's (Epicurean or Lucretian) materialist philosophy of chance. But proof of it at the historical level is not lacking, and Machiavelli takes care to provide a good list which includes not only the Romans, but the Assyrians, the Persians, the Franks, the Turks, the Germans and the "Saracen sect" (*Ibid.*), that is, the Muslim peoples. This shows that Machiavelli's principle is fully modern and very adequate to our situation. Just as the Cartesian *cogito* but at the level of politics, it is the modernity that declares that, in what matters most, the truly important question is not, as the last decades have preached, about difference, but about sameness. Indeed, can we think of a more apt variant of the (Badiouian) egalitarian prescription, to which it seems to add an unexpected but perhaps productive twist, than the idea that all peoples in the world are capable of *virtù*?

This means that the bases for pursuing the struggle for a free way of life are there; however, they are so scattered that one can hardly see anything resembling a proper battlefield today. In this situation, placing Machiavelli in the battlefield can only mean to reopen his own battlefield in our present and to declare today's lines and positions flimsy and in need of re-drafting at all levels. This article is meant as an initial step toward this task, which essentially consists in examining the conditions for such reopening by means of a Machiavellian diagnosis of our times and an analysis of the extent to which the existing human matter is made politically inept or "lives politically (*viv[e] politicamente*)" (*Discourses* III 8.1).

Using Machiavelli's language and concepts seems adequate in an article on Machiavelli, but it is necessary in dealing with our situation. This is due to the corruption of language, to the fact that many of the most important terms we use and see used as a matter of course, and through which we think or believe we think—i.e. primarily those which, as we shall see in this article, carry and impose the liberal ideas and politics—have become totally unfit to describe how things are and, as importantly, how we wish them to be. For language is both the first casualty and a chief instrument of corruption, so that it immediately corrupts the main political faculty, that is, political judgement (or practical wisdom, *phronesis*), and the main political bond, that is, friendship or comradeship. As it is argued in what is perhaps the most famous speech in *Florentine Histories*: "first, there is neither union nor friendship among the citizens, except among those who have knowingly committed some wickedness..." (III 5). This means that instead of companionship, fellowship, comradeship or friendship, what we have is relations between '*accomplices*', also known as partners.

But Machiavelli's language only dispenses its full meaning as part of his style and tempo—that “boisterous *allegriissimo*”, as Nietzsche praised it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he “presented the most serious matters” (aphorism 28). For Machiavelli's style, that joyfulness so dear to Nietzsche and in no way out of tune with his *gaya scienza*, is not a simple external form which, like a cloak, can be put on and thrown off at any time, but is fully consistent with Machiavelli's stance and his view of knowledge as requiring both seriousness and cheerfulness, gravity and lightness. This is well known and has been highlighted in Machiavelli scholarship; however, these oppositions are deficient and far from fully grasping the attitudes and the dialectics involved, since cheerfulness, irony, comedy and distance are themselves taken most seriously, while seriousness itself is playfully exercised. This is because playful detachment, irony and the like are not a mere self-referential game, closed upon one's own self, but an open attitude towards the world which transgresses social conventions and taboos, and sheds light on things and aspects of things that would otherwise remain undisclosed. Doing that, combining gravity and lightness so that they appear “joined in an almost impossible conjunction” (*Histories* VIII 36) in a single person, “seems praiseworthy to me”—Machiavelli tells his friend Vettori in a famous letter—“because we imitate nature, which is varied [che è varia]” (*Letters*, 31 January 1515). Machiavelli's style and tempo are thus the style and tempo of a stance and a praxis, from which they are inseparable—an audacious stance and an intrepid praxis which, as Nietzsche argued, “risk[ed] long, difficult, hard, dangerous thoughts and the tempo of the gallop and the very best, most capricious humour” (*Ibid.*). If Machiavelli's style is inimitable—the closest to it today is probably Slavoj Žižek's, although Žižek is a Hegelian, with all the advantages, perhaps philosophical, and disadvantages, probably political, that this may have—then let us at least not lose his joyful ‘matter-of-factness’ approach, so suitable for thought and action.

## 1. THE MACHIAVELLIAN SITE AND THE COURT HUMANISTS OF HIS AND OUR TIMES

The approach taken in this article is intended to be consistent with both Machiavelli's own approach, that dialectic between theory and practice which goes under the name of “effectual truth (*verità effettuale*)” (*Prince* 15), and the effectual truth of our situation. Both determine the battlefield as the only site appropriate to our situation and faithful to the militant stance of a man who, “driven (*spinto*) by that natural desire that has always been in me to work (*operare*), without any fear (*senza alcuno rispetto*), for those

things I believe will bring common benefit to everyone”, did not hesitate to take a path “no less dangerous ... than to seek unknown waters and lands” as is striving after a new politics or, in his own words, “new modes and orders” (*Discourses* I Preface). This is a most bold step; by taking it Machiavelli parts company with Lucretian philosophy, and not only with this philosophy. So no ‘Epicurean gardens’, which in a world like the one depicted by Epicurus and Lucretius can only be delusory, but politics.

This has immediate implication for us, for our positioning. Machiavelli’s ironical posing as a supplicant before an actual prince in the dedicatory letter of *The Prince* defies us to think through our own position. For we need not be the kind of captain Machiavelli refers to—“That a captain ought to be a knower of sites”, thus he entitles a chapter of the *Discourses* (III 39), where captain stands for a major figure of the subject and sites are either battle sites or related to the struggle—in order to know and recognise the truth of one’s position, which is the first truth without which there can be no other truth. I therefore assume that we are in the trenches and that we cannot pretend to simply observe and analyse the war from afar, unsullied by the struggle—except, let us be clear, as part, and undoubtedly a fundamental part, of the combat operations. Consistent with his own position, Machiavelli himself challenges us, most visibly in the dedications of his two major works, to pursue his (in)famous path. Nobody has been closer to understanding the Machiavellian site than L. Althusser when, on Gramsci’s trail and after Lefort’s great work (1986), he argues that Machiavelli “hails us [nous interpelle] from a place that he summons us to occupy as potential ‘subjects’ (agents) of a potential political practice” (1995: 79; 1999: 32)—only we need no longer inverted commas to refer to the notion of subject, nor do we want to suggest that the subject could be a mere ‘agent’. Indeed we consider it as a major category of politics, one that today—that is, in case someone thinks that Machiavelli did not claim this rare figure of excess—has been fully reconstructed at the core of a philosophy, nothing less than Alain Badiou’s, Althusser’s disciple. Nobody has better analysed Machiavelli’s ‘theoretical dispositive’, its quality of having been thought through ‘in the conjuncture’ and the political practice derived from this, than Althusser.

And yet we have to distance ourselves from Althusser when he practically reduces Machiavelli’s revolutionary project, although not its revolutionary consequences, to the problem of Italian unification. Althusser is right in highlighting the question of the conjuncture as absolutely central to Machiavelli’s thought; he was the first to undertake a most thorough analysis fully consequent with this idea. In doing this he pointed out the

right direction to us. However, it is not difficult to show that Machiavelli's conjuncture is much wider than the conjunctural problem posed by Italian unification, just as today's conjuncture is much wider than the problem posed by European unification. I likewise claim that what Althusser calls the 'dual point of view' is not "irreducible" (1995: 72; 1999: 26), but subjected to a higher point of view, that of the *subject*, and that it is only within the latter, which can be reduced neither to that of 'the founder' (this is elitism, and the Straussians are obviously its keenest practitioners) nor to that of the people or the multitude (this is what we should probably call democratism, and its keenest practitioners are to be found in the left), that the dual point of view is effectual.

Machiavelli's project is of a much wider scope and longer range than the problem of Italian unification; the struggle that he initiated could not end with Italian unification or with any other kind of final resolution—just as Marx's project cannot and could not, contrary to utopian expectations, have an end. It is in accordance with this eminently endless character of the struggle that Machiavelli theorised a praxis and its transmission—a praxis whose continuous character must be strongly emphasised, as it involves both the everyday and the extraordinary. Machiavelli's intervention exceeds therefore the historically specific conjuncture and becomes an intervention in the human predicament. He thus undertook very careful preparations for the transmission of his thought, particularly to the youth, whom he treated as his privileged addressees in what concerns the extraordinary on account of the fact that the young's impetuosity allows them to entertain a privileged relation with chance and thus with *fortuna*, which for this very reason "is a friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity" (*Prince* 25). This is also the reason why he dedicated his *Discourses on Livy* to his young friends, whom he called "princes", a polysemic word in Machiavelli and the name of the subject *par excellence* which here means "not those who are princes but those who for their infinite good parts deserve to be". But Machiavelli addresses himself to all, or rather, to *anyone*; anyone, in the figure of the singular universal, is encouraged to follow his militant path:

"For it is the duty of a good man (è officio di uomo buono)—he says—to teach others the good that you could not put into effect (operare) because of the malignity of the times and of fortune, so that when many are capable of it, someone of them more loved by heaven may be able to put it into effect (operarlo)" (*Discourses* II Preface 3).

What is the Machiavellian path, then, that (in)famous “path as yet untrodden by anyone (*una via, ... ancora de alcuno trita*)” which Machiavelli claimed he “without any fear”, “decided to take”? (*Discourses* I Preface). There may be and there have been many disputes about the precise nature of that path, but what cannot be disputed is, first of all, that in pursuing such path Machiavelli began an altogether new war: a new war in a new territory against a new enemy which required a new battlefield. Secondly, that Machiavelli declared, opened and defined that battlefield. And thirdly, the historical reality of such battlefield, which has never ceased to split and allocate adversaries and contenders along its demarcating lines, and its enduring existence up to the present. However, today perhaps more than ever this battlefield has to be reopened, all too often populated as it is by scholars bent on blurring the battle lines. We are not concerned here with the Straussian scholarship on Machiavelli, since their camp is crystal-clear: they have some trouble with the position of the people as a peculiar kind of political subject in Machiavelli, but even more with Machiavelli’s unveiling of the aristocratic prejudice, or ‘premise’, as mere oligarchic ideology, so that, consistent with their nostalgic elitism, they believe they resolve this tension by considering Machiavelli’s view as “extremely populist” (Strauss 1958: 131).<sup>2</sup>

Who are then the scholars bent on blurring the battle lines? They are today’s court humanists, not fundamentally different from the court humanist of Machiavelli’s time. They are to be found among the many varieties of civic republicanism, among the growing number of those who spot ever more ‘Machiavellian moments’—even in French thought, if we are to believe Miguel Abensour (2011), has one of such moments taken place, or is taking place, curiously enough without Althusser—and a whole array of other interpretations, including neo-Foucauldian ones. But they are not confined to Machiavelli scholarship, and here one should mention the theoreticians of the ‘return of the political’. Today’s court humanists are therefore those, particularly on the Left, whose critical stance is suspiciously influenced by the reassuring feeling of being after all fully at home in the system, so that they tend to present a domesticated figure of Machiavelli which excludes some of the most decisive aspects of his thought which do not fit their stance of adaptation. It seems thus timely to recall that Machiavelli took the court humanists of his own time to task, even if he had to in part use their own language so as to entice his mainly humanist readership and lead them to his own non humanist, not to say anti-humanist, perspective.

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<sup>2</sup> For a pointed analysis of some of the main modern vindications of Machiavelli, see Balakrishnan (2005).



For Machiavelli's 'untrodden path' was not only opened against (classical or idealist) political philosophy, or what was taken to be such, that is, in essence a reflection on politics allegedly pursued from a philosophical stance of 'neutrality' towards 'the political' which immunises against actual politics.<sup>3</sup> Nor was it against religion alone, despite the boldness of Machiavelli's attack and the consequential nature of his break with Christianity both as religion and 'sect' (meaning the organised clergy), or only against religious fundamentalism (as incarnated, for instance, by Savonarola, the 'unarmed prophet' who was a keen preacher of book burning and ended up fuelling a bonfire in Piazza della Signoria). Such new path was also and in a fundamental way opened against the civic humanists' republican discourse and the stance of adaptation to the powers that be on which it was based.

The significance of this critique cannot possibly be overemphasised—it was fundamental in Machiavelli's times and it is equally so today. This has to do with the fact that the civic humanists enjoyed a good reputation, as they spoke as passionate advocates of the new times against the medieval ones and thus of the active life against the contemplative one, of worldly liberty against otherworldly salvation and of the civic participation of citizens in their own self-government—roughly the same republican discursive tenets one finds today, including in the form of a supposedly 'return of the political' proclaimed precisely when actual politics was becoming more and more reactionary. With such discourse the civic humanists undoubtedly flattered their times and pleased the oligarchy. As far as the reality of actual politics is concerned, as seen, for example, through the minutes of the councils (*consulte* or *pratiche*) to which influential Florentines were summoned by the gonfalonier Soderini, F. Gilbert (1984) has shown that in reality the humanists' discourse shared the same basic principles and concerns as the other two discourses or currents of opinion present in the councils, namely: what may be called the realists, repeatedly exposed by Machiavelli as "the wise men of our times", who incessantly preached "to enjoy the benefit of time" (Prince 3) and remind us of the 'wise Marxist' of yore preaching that 'history is in our side'; and the Christians, mainly Savonarola's followers (dubbed *piagnoni*, weepers or snivelers, by Machiavelli). It is very conservative principles and concerns which, in different variants, can be found in most periods; they centre around concord among citizens (hence the perils of conflict; in this all discourses seem to be Habermasians *avant la lettre*, bent on de-antagonising), the inherent goodness of supposedly original institutions (hence the perils of

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<sup>3</sup> See Badiou (1998) for a critique of the thinking of politics known as political philosophy.

change), the virtue of the happy middle and of temporising—all denounced by Machiavelli as delusions serving to support the oligarchic powers and misconceptions having a devastating effect on the youth, many of whom were thereby intellectually misled and politically disabled.

It is all too evident that essentially the same stance and to all practical effects equivalent principles and concerns are upheld by the humanists' epigones of our time, who also indulge in the pleasant republican topics of active citizenship and political participation. Underpinning their stance as critical but integrated voices within the system there is an almost compulsive attachment to the *status quo* and a vigilant fear of losing their position in it. Theirs is exactly the position which blurs the battle lines and hampers the split into two of politics, thereby providing a decisive support for the system. Many will certainly claim that they practice just scholarship, that is, uninvolved or 'neutral'; they do not seem concerned with the idea that perhaps any minimally consequent scholarly analysis of Machiavelli demands a more truthful position. Nor do they seem worried by the possibility that their scholarship may also serve to intellectually disorient and politically disqualify the young.

Let us conclude this part by making a Weberian wager for a mutually enlivening distinction between scholarship and politics, which means holding onto the tensions between them and thus allowing to each their own autonomy and specific dignity. For the "effectual truth" is a check against delusions, not a device to stifle thought and be stuck in what merely exists; nor can it be separated from "a strong ethical and political project" (del Lucchese 2010: 16) whose emancipatory name for Machiavelli is a free way of life.

## 2. CAPITALISM'S NEW TEMPORALITY: THE MECHANICAL RENEWAL OF CORRUPTION

If we now consider our situation, our present predicament, as Machiavelli wanted, that is to say, by looking 'il male in viso' (evil in its face), and try to characterise what we see, then the following three-dimensional conceptualisation could do the initial job: a structuring activity defined by the automatism of the capitalist machinery, the latter's relentless labour on the human matter with which it feeds itself, and the ever more frequent radical disruption of everyday life through abrupt shakings and shocks which clear the ground for the ever-renewed expansion of capital circulation. This seemingly abstract and even totalising characterisation is after all

commensurate with the extremely abstract and (at the mechanical level, which is devoid of meaning) totalizing nature of capitalism. We can make it more concrete by referring to the fact that individuals, caught as they are in what Weber called “the mighty cosmos of the modern economic order” (*Protestant Ethic*, 1920: 203), certainly feel the power of that cosmos as an external, objective (‘cosmic’ or systemic) force. However, individuals are not simply caught in that cosmos, as if they were an external reality incorporated from the outside into it; for not only does this cosmos “determine with an irresistible constraining force” their lives, but, more significantly, it “trains and forges” their beings (*Ibid.*, 203 and 37). So individuals are not merely lured into consumption, for example, but shaped as consumers; indeed if need be—and this is a third level of, say, forging, which is often first historically—they are violently compelled to become consumers.

This violent imposition of a form is becoming more and more frequent; for a paradigmatic example think of students in England under the new university fees, forced into a regime of control and a coercive pedagogy—for compulsory debt-financing is not a mere economic matter—which will ineluctably depoliticize and transform them into mere consumers. The case of the students is a good example of both capitalism’s “constant revolutionizing” of its own conditions and the extraordinary *political* violence (to be distinguished from the subsequent more strictly economic violence) which such revolutionizing requires. To Marx’s legendary description, done in an almost admiring tone of astonishment, of capitalism’s ‘deeds’, its “constant revolutionizing of production”, its “uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions” and its amazing dissolving power of bonds held to be solid or sacred, nothing can be added except the ever-higher pace of these processes. Indeed, whenever capitalism is the uncontested power in the world, it subjects it to an ever more devastating pace of shakings and shocks which affects so fully the everyday, supposedly normal, life that it is disruption itself what becomes normalised—herein lies the peculiar ontological status of capitalism today: it is a new temporality made up of disjointed moments whereby time is divested of practically any subjectivation proper, that is, of the dispositions oriented toward action and the patient dedication to an activity, to the construction of a praxis. Thus, with all the impulses to stretch out beyond the given curtailed, often by incorporation when they manage to emerge, all what is in principle allowed is sheer adaptation. Is this not the best indication of the stagnant, ossified character—despite all the agitation—of our time?

The first dimension in the three-fold characterisation we have just outlined is the more encompassing one; it consists in the deep and apparently

inescapable entrenchment of the automatism of the self-propelling and ever-expanding circulation of capital. Once put in place, this machinery works mechanically, by itself, based on its own automatism and thus in a totally depersonalised fashion. It was Weber who particularly emphasised this fundamental aspect of the capitalist machinery, the fact that the kind of relationship it creates “is the most impersonal relationship of practical life into which humans can enter with one another” (1978: 636). This is totally unheard-of and Machiavelli could not foresee it; and yet, Machiavelli’s view of politics and human life is, as I expect to show shortly, as suitable as ever to try and come to terms with it. Now this impersonal machinery is still a social machinery, indeed an economic-symbolic cosmos or matrix which needs human matter to function; so it takes human matter and shapes and moulds it in order to give it the forms, through a combination of violence and shaping of the affects, suitable to feed the automatism. What moves it, what propels capital, is “one sole life impulse (einen einzigen Lebenstrieb)”, a “boundless blind drive (maßlos blinden Trieb)” which is an “immanent drive (immanente Trieb)” to ever renewed economic value in ever expanded forms (Capital I 10.1, 10.5 and 12). This is well known; what is less clear is the precise status of this drive and the way it inheres in human matter. According to Žižek, “drive inheres to capitalism at a more fundamental [than individual interpellation], systemic, level” (2006: 61); it is “the impersonal compulsion”, or, as he argues elsewhere, “the objectivized urge to compete and profit, to keep the circulation of capital flowing” (2009b: 453), which—Žižek insists—is inscribed into the capitalist system itself. Yet it is only by inhering in human matter that the drive is a drive and is able to propel the system, and the manner wherein this happens remains unexplained.

The first thing to be said here, evident as it may seem, is that this is not a question of the “*subjective* appropriation (*subjektive Aneignung*)” of religious-ethical maxims which underpinned the formation of the methodical life conduct so decisive in bringing about modern capitalism (Weber 1920: 161). Drive enters into action as a dominant force once the system is in place; but then the system can work by itself, “on a mechanical basis”, for “victorious capitalism needs its support”—the support of the initial subjectivation, that is, the ‘spirit’ of Protestant asceticism—“no longer” (*Ibid.*, 204). Contrary to the initial subjectivation, that is—if we maintain Žižek’s fundamental elaboration of the distinction between desire and drive—to subjectivation in the mode of desire, which in a bitter battle against the traditional society “endeavoured to transform the world and be effective in it” (*Ibid.*, 203), drive is entirely at the service of an already constituted system and its logic.

So, how does this inner compulsion with its quasi-objective character inhere in human matter, or how is the latter caught in it? The answer—we enter now into the second dimension of our initial characterisation—may well lie in the fact that, crucially, drive is directly linked to mere adaptation to the world and to specific desires contingent on such adaptation, including the desire to be and be seen as a ‘virtuoso’ of adaptation. Here Weber can also be of help, particularly through the idea of ‘*Eingestelltheit*’, a term which in Weber’s conceptualisation should be understood as an inner adjustment or attuning toward an existing system or organised practice which has become an almost unconscious set disposition and orientation.<sup>4</sup> “The decisive impulse (Antrieb)—Weber argues—for all economic action under the conditions of a market economy is”, for the capitalist, alongside “one’s own capital-risk and profit chances” (which is obviously in stark contrast with “the coercion [Zwang] exerted by the risk of complete deprivation” in the case of the workers, and which, as part of a rationally calculated operation, has nothing to do with the spirit of adventure), “an inner ‘professional’ adjustment (‘berufsmässige’ *Eingestelltheit*) towards rational acquisitive activity” (1976: 60), that is, ultimately to the “self-moving substance” (*Capital I 4*), to the supposedly self-engendering circular movement of capital.

Now, to gauge the power of ‘*Eingestelltheit*’ in human action and conduct, and its significance in Weber’s analysis, let us point out that this inner adjustment become set disposition is at the core not just of habit but, say, of habit gone mad, and, as such, tends to be experienced as binding and incorporated as expectation with regard to the conduct of others, to the point that it may become almost a *de facto* guarantee of enforcement (1976: 191-2). It is also a major foundation of, and an almost insurmountable obstacle to dispense with, the modern “bureaucratic apparatus of rule (bürokratischen Herrschaftsapparat)”, which obviously includes “public administration as well as private economic management”. The absolutely central historical significance of such an apparatus, which has now evolved, as we shall see shortly, into a huge array of corporate managerial bureaucracies ruling almost unchallenged over practically all social realms and institutions, cannot possibly be overemphasised. But our point here is that it rests not only on “technical training and functional specialisation of work”, but on the bureaucrats’ and managers’ “inner adjustment (*Eingestelltheit*) to painstaking obedience” and to perform “single functions which are habitual and mastered in a virtuoso way” (*Ibid.*, 570). The power of this “inner ‘disposition’ of the soul (innere

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<sup>4</sup> See *Economy and Society*, ch. 2, section 14. The English translation (1978: 110) is very misleading.

seelische 'Eingestelltheit') towards regularities" is such that Weber wonders about the possibility of novelty, including political 'novelty'. For how "can any 'novelties' whatsoever emerge" when such disposition "hosts tangible 'inhibitions' against novelties" (Ibid., 188)? What seems clear to Weber is that, in the political terrain, not revolt, let alone revolution, but restoration is what such disposition can foster and sustain, to the point that it is "through an appeal to this inner disposition (Eingestelltheit) to obedient compliance, *bred in the officials and in the subjects alike*" that "every reorganization of defeated or scattered army units, as well as every restoration of an administrative order destroyed by revolts, panics, or other catastrophes, is effected. If the appeal is successful it brings, as it were, the disturbed mechanism to 'snap into gear' again" (Ibid., 570, emphasis added).

In the case of the capitalist order or cosmos, the peculiarity of that inner disposition to adjust, according to Weber, is that it is performed

"as) A 'proof' ('Bewährung') of one's performance (Leistung) and B form of autonomous control over those human beings dependent on one's own orders, as well as) C over the chances of an indefinite number of people to access important cultural or life goods—in a word, *power*" (1976: 60).

What we have here is thus an almost pure instance of the subjectivity of power: in effect, true *enjoyment* of power seeks infinitely more than just control and command over one's fellows and their life chances (points and C above), it demands *recognition* as a *deserved*, and thus legitimate, power, ultimately based on who one is, on the greater excellence and worthiness of one's own being—in the case of capitalism (point above), based on one's superior performance, so on the amount of profit and on this alone, which is the 'proof' of one's superior qualities and hence of one's own superiority.

We are thus in the terrain of desire, which seems to reinforce and even underpin that of drive. As a direct manifestation of drive, *Eingestelltheit* has to be radically distinguished from the subjectivation attached to a very different inner disposition which Weber called '*Gesinnung*', often translated as inner conviction and, problematically, as conviction simply. "*Eingestelltheit* and *Gesinnung* both set the individual inwardly to certain orientations and behaviours" (Darmon 2011: 207), but here their similarity ends. Thus while *Gesinnung* is a quest to go beyond the given which involves the development of a conduct of life or a praxis (*Gesinnung*—says Hegel in *Phenomenology*—"aims at action, i.e. at actualizing itself"), *Eingestelltheit* seeks to adjust to a given system or practice and the enjoyment of its mere repetition, particularly

in the form of a 'virtuoso' performance, thus always remaining within the logic of the system. This opposition brings out a seeming paradox which is most revealing, namely, that while *Gesinnung* is both personal (life conduct is mainly rooted in personal life) and self-transcending, *Eingestelltheit* by contrast is impersonal and self-centred. Thus being personal, *Gesinnung* is susceptible to ethical conduct, its ethical meaning lying precisely in its self-transcending character, while *Eingestelltheit*, being impersonal, is devoid of ethical meaning—indeed meaning and satisfaction are found not in an ethical conduct which is beyond or beneath its scope but in the “self-centred passions [it] entrenches” (Darmon, *Ibid.*),<sup>5</sup> that is, in the satisfaction of repetition and the desire for power and its enjoyment. A dual drive-desire *dispositif* is at work here: on the one hand, the capitalist drive finds satisfaction in adaptation and adjustment to the mechanism of endless capital circulation; on the other hand, the desire for power and the *jouissance* it brings. While this desire, as we have seen, reinforces drive, in reality it is contingent on drive and serves as a kind of compensation for being stuck, as if were, in *Eingestelltheit*. All are caught in this mutually reinforcing loop of objectivized urge to adjust and self-gravitating quest for *jouissance*, which is of course also served by capital—the single result being that the world remains as it is: mere matter to be processed by capital. It seems thus clear that it is fundamentally *Eingestelltheit*, this inner disposition to adjust and more broadly adaptation with all the supplements of *jouissance* it involves, what defines our time—a time whose frenzy cannot hide its real, namely: being a petrified time.

We can, with Machiavelli's help, put all this in a much more political language which will in addition allow us to grasp better the historical specificity of our times. In effect, in Machiavelli's terms, the peculiarity of our times would seem to be that they constitute an unheard-off combination of servitude and licence—servitude which is the other side of tyranny (hence one only needs to refer to one of the terms to mean the inseparable couple 'servitude-tyranny'), and license which is Machiavelli's name not just for anarchy, but for lassitude, hedonism, permissiveness and, to sum up, *jouissance*. In a crucial chapter of the *Florentine Histories* (IV 1) Machiavelli challenges the widespread belief that cities frequently change their regimes “between liberty and servitude”, and affirms that the changes are rather between “servitude [i.e. servitude-

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<sup>5</sup> See Darmon (2011). In addition to bringing out the importance of *Eingestelltheit* and some of its main specificities with regard to *Gesinnung*, this paper shows that Boltanski and Chiapello's laborious claim about a supposed *New 'spirit' of Capitalism* (Verso: 2005) is unfounded and largely based on mistaking new forms of adaptation and inner adjustment (and the moralising enveloping it all) for a new 'spirit'.

tyranny] and license". In this connection, our times, in another turn of the screw, seem to have brought to a halt these shifts, so that we now live under a regime which automatically produces, reproduces and works on the basis of an entrenched combination of servitude-tyranny and licence—this would be the true substance of the alleged 'end of history' thesis. Leaving aside the fact that in reality Machiavelli does by no means consider servitude-tyranny and licence as incompatible (indeed his view constitutes a sophisticated *avant la lettre* version of Montaigne's *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*), what is fundamental in his affirmation that all too often the historical shifts take place between servitude-tyranny and licence is that politics in the sense of the struggle for a free way of life has been deactivated. Thus the humours or passions or desires involved there are not the two antagonistic political desires, the desire to dominate and the desire not to be dominated (*Prince* 9; *Discourses* I 4 and 5.2; *Histories* II 12 and III 1)—desires whose very political nature emerges from and is defined by their conflicting interplay, so that we have here a kind of Hegelian 'dialectical antagonism' which is constitutive of the political terrain.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the desires prevailing in that situation, according to Machiavelli's detailed description in *Florentine Histories*, are not two, but many: a whole variety of "diverse humours" as "everyone ha[s] a different end" (III 21); secondly, the nature of such desires is constituted by "private enmities" (V 4), involving suspicions, vengeance, envy, jealousy and hatred; thirdly, they are usually organised, shaped and exploited by parties, factions or sects, hence they are the humours of the parties (II 10 and IV 26); lastly, and as a consequence of all this, Machiavelli often (dis)qualifies them politically as "malignant", "ill" or "wicked humours".<sup>7</sup>

However, all this proliferation of private enmities fed on envy, hatred and the like constitutes only an apparent variety of desires, since each individual's own passions differ in nothing essential, other than in being her or his own and perhaps in the dose, from those of other individuals, so that in reality there is only *one* desire and many carriers in *competitive* conflict with one another. We can thus see that by emphasising the shifts between servitude-tyranny and licence Machiavelli points to the *rarity* of politics, for the presence of any

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<sup>6</sup> Of course this dialectical antagonism is without dialectical synthesis, which should not be seen as a flaw in Machiavelli's hallmark theorisation of the political passions or desires; far from that, Machiavelli's thought, his apparently unfinished conceptualisations and digressions enmeshed in a variety of lively narratives, not only gives the lie to the dominant idea of him being the founder of a positive science, even a technique, of politics, but seems most apt to expose politics or a political praxis which is by definition without closure. In other words: what Althusser (1995 and 1999b) has so well captured as the unwonted character of Machiavelli's thought, the very fact that it grips and simultaneously disconcerts us so much, is the best sign of its profound political character.

<sup>7</sup> *Histories* II 16, IV 26 and *Discourses* I 7; *Discourses* III 3; and *Histories* IV 28.



or both of these situations implies the absence of the antagonistic *two* which is the sign of a truly political or free way of life. What is new today is not just this absence of politics, but the fact that its neutralisation has become part of the regular workings of the capitalist machinery. We live today in what Žižek, echoing Rancière, has called “post-politics” (1999: 198), the age of the alleged overcoming of politics in which conflict would have been reduced to conflict of interests and political action and government to competent, expertise-based administration and ‘governance’. But ‘post-politics’ is a very problematic term, perhaps simply inadequate, at any rate very confusing and misleading. The term reveals the ideological pretension, liberal *par excellence*, to overcome politics, while it conceals the highly effective ideological labour of depoliticization or naturalisation it serves and the kind of compatible (that is, outwardly oriented) politicization it requires and promotes. For “pure post-politics”, as Žižek argues, “is inherently impossible” (2009b: 268); it needs an explicitly political supplement compatible with the ‘post-political’ sophistry, and “populist politicization” (*Ibid.*), with its totally simplistic flattening of the complexity of reality and the creation of scapegoats such as the ‘immigrants’, undoubtedly provides this ideal supplement.

The conceptual inadequacy of the term ‘post-politics’ lies above all in that it unproblematizes ‘post-political’ administration, obfuscating its very political nature and concealing the ease with which, given an appropriate context (for example, contemporary Europe), its intrinsic link with populist politics can go a little step further in deploying its immanent tendencies and become a link with fascism. Perhaps the first thing to state, to avoid misunderstandings, is that ‘post-politics’ is simply the name for the liberal politico-ideological pretension, and therefore nothing new at all. What is new today is that liberalism is not challenged by any sufficiently coherent and organised alternative politics. Regarding liberalism’s ‘post-political’ pretension, we must ask: is not Hobbes’s operation a political attempt to negate politics internally by erecting an authoritarian state based on the individuals’ relinquishment of their political capacities in exchange for the security of their lives and property? Administration and government have since then been, with some drawbacks and discontinuities, ‘post-political’, and so focused on (politically) disposing and arranging things so as to allow the smooth, undisturbed functioning and expansion of the capitalist logic—this aspect, but with telling ambiguity and deafening silences regarding the capitalist aim and logic, is what, to general acclaim, Foucault (2004a) conceptualised as ‘governmentality’. It is this liberal governmental rationality which, in accordance with the needs of capital and in blatant contradiction with the liberal *laissez-faire* ideologemes which, as I show elsewhere (Frade

2007), Foucault took too literally—the idea of governing through ‘freedom’ and the suspicion that “on gouverne toujours trop”, i.e. there is always too much government (2004b: 324)—transformed the state into the huge centralized bureaucratic machine we know today. As Polanyi (1957) has documented and explained, liberal political interventionism has since the 19th century resorted more and more to administrative methods in order to radically transform social life, which has resulted in an exponential growth of the state’s administrative functions, including totally new functions of surveillance, policing, control and certainly discipline and punishment—all done so as to enable the state to satisfy the demands of capital, whose free circulation obviously requires the constantly renewed and growing control over society. Today the administrative method has become a much more freehand, i.e. managerial, method.

Managerialism constitutes today’s main instantiation of the regime of servitude-tyranny and license, one that in a significant measure imposes the former by resorting to the latter. The managerialisation (that is, the commodification and managerialisation, as these constitute the two sides of a single phenomenon) of social matter is something we see relentlessly pursued today in education, health care and almost any realm of social life. To managerialise social matter essentially consists in two parallel processes: firstly, destroying the inner logic and the dignity of a social realm (e.g. education, health care) by subjecting it to specifically designed external instruments of domination such as satisfaction questionnaires addressed to individuals as mere consumers or subjects of *jouissance* (e.g. National Student Survey, student ‘experience’ indicators and ‘feed-back’ forms which measure the individuals’ *jouissance*), targets and league tables; and, secondly, using these instruments in order to pit all and each against all and each (all an each: academics, students, departments, faculties, universities and, if we take into account the regime of control under which universities are put to work, regions and countries). Managerialism is an extremely contagious fanatical political ideology which has transformed all institutions and administrations (hospital and all National Health Service organisations; schools, universities and all educational institutions; local councils and all ‘public’ institutions) into *corporate managerial bureaucracies*, organisational machines which are the very antithesis of an institution, designed precisely in order to be divested of any ins-tituting function and endowed instead with the function of des-tituting all symbolic orientations and subjectivities which obstruct the mere adaptation and adjustment to the circulation of capital, which they serve. Corporate managerial bureaucracies are therefore ‘*des-titutions*’; run, in accordance with their nature, by managers, and organised

as pyramidal hierarchies, they constitute the contemporary embodiment, a very accomplished one, of servitude-tyranny which rule much of our daily lives today.

We thus arrive at the third dimension of this initial characterisation of our present. It is this dimensions which poses, if not the most important then at least the most urgent problem, for it is the one that more directly shapes our temporality—a wholly new temporality largely determined by what I wish to call, putting Naomi Klein's book title (2008) under a proper Machiavellian context, *terror shock politics*. It is not so much the terror shocks as such what makes our time wholly new, for they are not less nor more new than modern capitalism, whose first terror shock goes under the name of 'primary accumulation' or enclosures. The newness today is rather their totally devastating pace, their ever more recurrent frequency, to the point that they become normalised and defining of the everyday.

Terror shock politics is not merely about the way capitalism takes advantage of catastrophes (supposedly external to capitalism) such as natural disasters, wars or crises. Terror shocks are, as said, of the essence of modern capitalism, whose beginning (and let me emphasise 'beginning') saw the terror shock of forcing out hundreds of thousands of families from their land—'primary accumulation' is the theoretical name of this initial shock, 'enclosures' is the name of its political weapon, and 'masterless men' and 'free' labour their medieval-looking and modern names. Nor are the terror shocks only or solely the *coups d'état* (like in Chile and Indonesia, to give but two examples) perpetrated to clear the ground for the unobstructed introduction of 'free' market capitalism. They take place at different territorial, sectoral and institutional levels, and at any moment, as is shown by the frequent terror shocks of privatisations and expropriations of institutions (universities, hospitals), entire sectors and fields (the forest) and of course countries and economic areas such as the EU (e.g. the so-called cuts or austerity, which have just been declared practically permanent). In addition to governments, the perpetrators *par excellence* of this terroristic politics are the corporate managerial bureaucracies referred to above, which incorporate such politics into their very design.

What terror shock politics does is not merely expropriate and appropriate the commons; in reality if it does that and is successful in doing it, it is because of the way in which terror shapes and moulds human matter, which is turned into a tabula rasa ready to start from scratch. Thus terror shock politics literally and plainly wipes the slate clean (see Žižek 2009a: 17ff), that

is, in Machiavellian language, turns human matter into *politically inert* or *de-subjectivated matter* ready to be given whatever form is deemed appropriate at any moment to adapt and adjust to the mechanisms of capital circulation and the supplements of *jouissance* this may bring. De-subjectivation is precisely the mission of des-titutions, the organisational machines endowed with the task of divesting individuals of any subjectivated disposition and with the power to resort to terror shocks as a matter of course. Individuals are thereby brought to a kind of ‘state of nature’, the liberal mythical state in which all they care about is comfortable self-preservation and even mere self-preservation. Absolute exposure and therefore fear are then inwardly transformed into an urge to adapt and adjust which may take more or less enthusiastic or reluctant forms but is always ready to unquestionably and with astonishing doses of cynicism strip one’s being off any substantive attachment to a praxis and the pride that goes with it. As we can witness more and more frequently, individuals in this situation, e.g. academics, become a kind of ‘non-beings’ with no pride left, totally isolated and mistrustful of each other, or turning against one another, who can be moved about like frightened animals—indeed academics are an exemplary case of what exactly politically inert matters looks like.

It is thus manifest that terror shock politics amounts to a total twist of Machiavelli’s (in)famous idea: “If one wishes a sect or a republic to live long, it is necessary to draw it back (*ritirarla*) often toward its beginning (*principio*)”—thus he entitles a central chapter of his Discourses (III 1), where beginning means both commencement and principle. It is the famous renewal of *virtù* by bringing about the terror of the founding moment or rather moments, since founding for Machiavelli is a continuous activity. What is renewed today is not *virtù*, but its nemesis, corruption. In other words: the aim of terror shock politics is to terrorise people so as to make them totally unfit or inept for a political or free way of life.

It is this *continuously renewed de-subjectivation* what defines our wholly new temporality: the temporality of the human animal striving for self-preservation and a supplement of *jouissance*—which brings to us a seemingly paradoxical lesson, namely: that the mythical state of the original or first humans coincides with the Nietzschean state of the last humans, with the latter self-contentedly proclaiming that it has discovered happiness, or at least the means for attaining it, and the former that there is no alternative. We should therefore be no surprised if this extinct or wordless present, as Badiou (2006) has qualified it, relentlessly addresses us through its defining twofold injunction against thought and for happiness: the injunction to

adapt, which means (and so is understood as soon as it is uttered) ‘do not think, adapt’, and the injunction to enjoy, the innocuous, because self-centred, *jouissance* which is also served by capital. What is thus preached is creeping conformism: to be stuck in the world as the world is, without trying to change it. This preaching can only come from the most reactionary politics, the politics stemming from a world which is totally petrified and has no future—if by future we understand something more than the thoughtless passage of time.

### 3. A ‘TRUTH TRUER THAN ANY OTHER TRUTH’: KEEPING THE PEOPLE ARMED

“How, then, are we to revolutionize an order whose very principle is constant self-revolutionizing?”, thus Žižek (2009a: 129) formulates the fundamental question. It is a variant of this question that we have to address here—one which takes explicitly into account, firstly, that such constant self-revolutionizing is of a very specific kind (as it renews corruption or political unfitness), and, secondly, that an order subjected to that principle is in reality a petrified order. Perhaps the first thing to be said is that there is no answer, nor should we look for the answer, to this question, since it has to be found and developed *politically*. What we can do here, drawing on the analysis we have done in the foregoing pages and on Machiavelli’s thought, is to provide some hints as to the types of intervention that can be effective and where they may be located. In this respect, it is important to see that although the question we have posed cannot be answered straight away, its very formulation does provide a first decisive indication as to what to do, namely, that refusing to collaborate as a fundamental form of action consisting in not acting may be as important, particularly at the beginning, as positive action. Of course this leads to another question: where and how to find the resources to act in these two senses of action?—which brings us to the problem of the people and to the central characteristic of a free people: how conflicting or tumultuous it is and the kind of conflicts it engages in.

We started this paper by stating, with Machiavelli, that all peoples are capable of *virtù*. Now is the moment to draw the implications of this axiomatic prescription. However, where are the people today—not the people as the object and partly the result of the terroristic politics we have just seen, nor the people as a substantial entity with sociological properties, but as a political category, that is, the people (in whatever of its figures) as a *political subject*—as the peculiar political subject which Machiavelli had the courage

to theorise and situate in the political stage? To this I can only answer that the sole people we have recently seen, and only for some weeks, were the Egyptian people, as they named themselves. Let us assume that the people are *the inexistent* (Badiou 2006) of our time, and that the altogether new prince will be, if it is to measure up to our wholly new temporality, neither a singular individual nor a revolutionary avant-garde of the party form, but a varying and polymorphous collective figure of the people—a wholly new figure of the people able to take on different forms, forms suitable to different situations and tasks, perhaps simply—but decisively—vanishing afterwards, whilst holding on to what Machiavelli called the truth that “is truer than any other truth” (*Discourses* I 21.1): keeping the people intellectually and materially armed, that is, subjectivated and ready to fight. This is the single mission and function of the new prince—a mission whose fulfilment will demand different forms of organization in different situations within a time already defined by the new prince.

It is above all in addressing the people that we risk recoiling from looking ‘il male in viso’, for there is a certain unwillingness in the left, when dealing with the people, to look at ‘reality’ in the face, coupled with a tendency to indulge in a kind of overexcited discourse on the multitude. Machiavelli’s stance should teach us something fundamental here. For Machiavelli was a flatterer neither of princes nor of peoples. He was “of the people” (*Prince*, Dedication) and a true lover of the people, as shown by the fact that he wanted to take and did take upon himself that “hard province [task or endeavour]”—he says—of “defend[ing] a thing”, i.e. the people in its active figure as multitude, which “has been accused by all writers”—and we ought to trust Machiavelli when he says that such an endeavour is “hard and full of so much difficulty” (*Discourses* I 58.1). That is true love, based not on delusions and self-indulgence, but on a courageous gaze at the world and the knowledge gained from this attitude.

It is in the context of this Machiavellian stance that I would like to situate one of the invariant ideas of the Badiouian fourfold matrix of revolutionary politics (2006: Preface section 5): trust in the people. This is a logical consequence, and not a mere strategic rule, of the egalitarian prescription that people can think and are capable of truth;<sup>8</sup> it implies an active disposition which must be made manifest, often through hard work, by constructing practices both in different social realms and transversal to them. For example,

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<sup>8</sup> “and although peoples, as Tully [Cicero] says, are ignorant, they are capable of truth” (*Discourses* I 4).

in the university, and more generally in education, where the idea that '*students can think*' is the first elementary axiom of any true teacher. One has therefore to dispute the widespread attitude which resigns itself in advance to the convenient view that students are not interested anyway—that's a false statement, one that often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and an excuse for not fulfilling one's duties as a teacher, duties which obviously involve risk and courage, particularly today, in view of the violent transformation of students into mere consumers. It is precisely those who resort to those excuses who are flatterers of students, that is, who have given in and devote themselves to pleasing their own and the students' quest for enjoyment, of course at the expense of the potentially self-transcending passions involved in any genuine education. This is just an example, but the same obtains with regard to the political capacity of workers and the *virtù* of peoples. The lesson to be drawn is that without trust in the people and the hard work it involves no emancipation is possible, since the point is not to make people happy whilst keeping them in servitude, but free.

And what can we say (in an initial approach) about conflict? If we continue to exercise the Machiavellian incisive and sober gaze, we could perhaps say that conflict and expressions of discontent define our present in part by their (near) absence and in part by the (near) futility of its typical forms. How can we understand this apparently paradox of conflict being absent and at the same time futile? Economic conflict is totally segmented and partial, while trade unions themselves are profoundly managerialised. Conflict in the current situation is essentially conflict between a variety of groups and identities. In the case of strikes, for instance, they usually take place against heavy, even vicious, media-promoted hostility from the rest of groupings and identities which, under the name of customers, users or public opinion, tend to consider any disturbance to their sacred right to enjoyment almost as a crime. In this situation it is even easier than in Machiavelli's time to turn to the neighbour, to one's fellow, usually under the name of immigrant or any of the abounding ethnic and religious identities—in other words: to turn *side-wards* instead of turning *up-wards*. So, although there are conflicts, in reality most of them have practically nothing to do with political conflict proper. On the contrary, such conflicts have devastating depoliticising effects, because they are *competitive* conflicts, whose workings reflect the pyramidal hierarchy of servitude and only serve to reinforce it—and not *antagonistic* conflicts, whose workings put into question the system and seek to change it.

But it is also true that the discontent is immense and is there—only it finds no political ways of expression. Indeed that very discontent is for the most

part not political; it is misconceived and therefore misarticulated and mis-expressed. Here we have the example of Greek left coalition which almost won the last general election: Syriza, probably the best that has happened to the left for decades. If Syriza has proved anything, it is that such discontent can be politically re-conceived and channelled in the appropriate emancipatory direction, that people listen to good reasons when these are presented to them (and is not Syriza the only 'voice of reason' in Greece today?) and that they can act, even under enormous difficulties.

The central difficulty to produce the split into Two of politics today is of course the mechanical and impersonal character of the capitalist machinery, which has brought about a huge and apparently insurmountable gap between the people, on the one hand, and the state and the automatism of the machinery over which it presides, on the other—look at how the machineries of privatization, appropriation and managerialisation of education and health care in Madrid continue impassively to function, as if nothing was happening, despite the almost daily strikes and demonstrations by teachers, doctors, nurses, students and patients! Or at 'privatization by stealth' in Britain and elsewhere. This means that political conflict today requires to address both the system and those who head it: the cannibal oligarchy we endure today and its executive arm, that is, the easily recruitable and growing managerial class which, through the des-titutions created for that purpose, occupies key positions at all levels and in all realms of social life.

And how can we deal with an oligarchy? This should pose no doubts after Machiavelli: as he shows in the *Discourses* (I 58), whereas a mad people can be persuaded by words, for a mad prince, i.e. for an oligarchy, there is not "any remedy other than steel (*il ferro*)". So, '*il ferro*', which means obviously '*il ferro*' and the threat thereof, and more generally a political *force* able to coerce the oligarchy into understanding, since it is not in a position to do so by words, and therefore ultimately to resort to violence, if need be. In other words: the new prince will be a true prince, a collective being of *virtù* acting in the world, with no trace of the moralising, political correctness, leftist 'saintliness' and escapist strategies which have brought the left to the political nullity it is today. Once again Syriza provides a fitting example of what the left needs today: on the one hand, of how the political strength it was able to wield compelled the European oligarchy to resort to a massive and most vicious campaign of fear to prevent Syriza from winning the elections. On the other hand, Syriza is now in a decisive crossroads: what is it going to do, seeing as it sees the neo-Nazi party (Golden Dawn) gaining more and more ground by resorting to the standard fascist recipe of creating a scapegoat (the



immigrant) with which to provide a fake political being to the people and doing so, which is also in the recipe, with the connivance of the state? Syriza must be bold and continue along the path it opened, but now take a step further: and since they cannot allow the people of Greece to become either nothingness or criminals, they must work hard on helping the people to self-organise themselves and construct a true political being. This task may well require, among other things, the creation of civil militias, a political form destined to give life, not mere animal life but proud human life, that may soon be needed elsewhere and not only in Greece, for, paraphrasing what Marx told the German readership of the first volume of *Capital*, we should say: Oh humans, oh forgetful peoples of Europe, pay attention: *De te fabula narratur*, the tale is told of you, not only of 'them'.

But all these, and Syriza itself, are only provisional forms which make the new prince conceivable. The condition of possibility, the 'occasione', for its emergence is there, in the void of an untold discontent. All the rest is up to us; the task is enormous, its difficulties utmost—but it will be gladly confronted if we hold onto our desire and, beyond hope and fear, "never give up" (*Discourses II 29*).

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Untio bla vitat fuga. Into ipsapel ignit, odipsantia nosa quo etur? Quibus di odioriorpos voluptatem re none sant atur sa quibus eos quasi aspesperum etur magna prosequenda eorum dentionsequi omnis eatur suntium entiam ideri dipis nest velle pro ventias con corepellam volorem faceperit, odi odiorruptas pellibu saperrum sam ium iunt.

Ut od quiaerit que omnis idistrumquam quis mollo endae. Et aut dolor sa vel iumet, same optis est, optae solore ent, omnis aperum ipsam ipsapienim experum quam facillest, sus as excera incistiasi omnienist, volupientur?

Aquiaspel exerepel in plandendiore odis voluptis minciat uribero ipsandunt ut velessi tem cus adis ut ende mil ipsande lestenimi, alibust vel ea veribus mi, tem et aute vidi iliciam dolum